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The educational situation of Spanish speaking persons of the Southwest is discussed. In ten out of the fifteen Texas metropolitan areas, 40% or more of the Spanish population has experienced less than four years of schooling; in eight out of ten California metropolitan areas, 20% or more are in the same category. Percentages rise as one proceeds north in Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico.

Two reasons for such a situation are offered: default of the school systems in providing equality of opportunity in education for ethnic groups, and lack of motivation for continuing education on the part of the Spanish speaking.

It is held that educational curricula should recognize to a much greater extent the cultural heritage of Spanish speaking students. A basic approach to barriers and inequalities contributing to early dropout should be developed.

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THE EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF A MINORITY

JULIAN SAMORA

The author discusses the educational situation of the Spanish-speaking population in the southwest. Mr. Samora is chairman of the Department of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame.

THE educational problem of minority groups is a complicated one for which no easy or ready-made solution is available. The American school system, whether public or parochial, functions best when conforming middle-class administrators and teachers professing middle-class values address themselves to middle-class students who possess the same value orientation or are in the process of acquiring it. Lower-class and minority-group students who do not fit the mold are less likely to be educated and more likely to become dropout statistics.

If it is true that the schools reflect the norms and values of the community, then perhaps it is equally true that its prejudices are also reflected, through acts of commission as well as omission. Few school systems can or do gear their curriculums to the needs of the minority or lower-class segment of the population. Few know, empirically, what these needs are.

The present paper is concerned with the educational situation of one minority group—the Spanish-speaking population in the southwest. The particular problems of this group are not necessarily the same as those associated with other minority groups, yet the responsibility of the schools remains the same for all of them.

THE 1960 U. S. Census enumerates 3,464,996 persons of Spanish surname in the five southwestern states. If one takes into account the Puerto Rican migration to the United States, the number

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of persons of Spanish surname in other states, the number of other Latin Americans (Cubans, Peruvians, etc.), and the legal and illegal entrants across the Mexican border, the total number of Spanish-speaking people in the United States is at least six million.

Of all the Spanish-speaking population in the southwest, 5 per cent are in Colorado, 6 per cent in Arizona, 8 per cent in New Mexico, and 41 per cent each in Texas and California. Thus 82 per cent are in the two states of California and Texas.

Although this paper is concerned primarily with education, a look at the related characteristics of the population, such as income, employment and unemployment, housing, and occupations, reveals that in the most general terms more Spanish-speaking persons fall in lower-status categories than do the other population groupings in the southwest.

Those persons today who claim that the Spanish-speaking are unindustrious, unambitious, and do not "take to education" need but to review the history of this population in the United States. We find a people who came to this country in the 1600's and 1700's; who established a folk society based on European traditions; who were isolated geographically and therefore culturally from the mainstream of western civilization; who lived a relatively "slow" life based on agriculture and the seasons; who had no particular need for education as we know it today; who, when conquered by the United States, were not assisted by the conquerors to make an adjustment to the new society; and who, when faced with the competition of the dominant society, could do little but withdraw into further isolation. When educational facilities were finally established, the Spanish-Americans could not be expected to flock to the schools since these were not an integral part of their culture. Even today, although facilities are generally adequate, the consequences of the long historical tradition are evident.

This picture was compounded by the influx of a very large number of immigrants (generally—peasant, rural, uneducated, of lower social-economic status) from Mexico whose traditional background did not include public education. The latter immigrants, however, not only faced the same general problems of the previous group, but also were afflicted with the scourge of discrimination and segregation. Segregation in educational facilities has been well documented, particularly in Texas; there, in many instances, three public-school systems have been maintained—one for the Mexican, one for the Negro, and one for the Anglo. In many areas of New Mexico and Colorado, discrimination was not so flagrant. Even in these states, however, many communities have had their "Mexi-

can rooms" for years and years. This is segregation on pseudo-pedagogical grounds; the reasoning is that children coming to school who do not speak English should be placed in a room by themselves in order to learn English. One community in Colorado had such segregation through the first four grades as late as 1950. A neighboring community just last year abandoned its "Mexican room" after pressure was brought by the local Spanish-speaking citizenry.

Among the Spanish-speaking, the biggest educational problem is that of dropouts. In the United States, formal education has been considered important for enlightened citizenship; and in recent years education has also become the foundation for occupational opportunities and related socioeconomic status.

The Spanish-speaking have seldom had optimum educational conditions. The more common barriers have been inadequate facilities, forced segregation, adverse cultural factors (language handicaps, little value placed on educational achievement, etc.), low socioeconomic status, and poor law enforcement by local officers. Consequently, Spanish-speaking children have either not attended school, have attended irregularly, have dropped out sooner, or have received an inferior education.

In recent years, two things have happened to improve the situation somewhat: (1) The basis for state-allotted school funds in most states has been changed from the annual school census, irrespective of school attendance, to the average daily attendance; this has increased the efforts of school officials to maintain high school attendance. (2) Through the *Mendez* case in Texas (1948) and other cases, the courts have restrained school districts and their officers from segregating pupils of Mexican or Latin American descent in separate schools or classes.

As long as segregated housing continues, however, segregated schooling will not have been dealt its death blow; nor have the subtleties of discrimination in the schools ended. As late as April, 1962, a noted Texas educator asserted that in some schools in his state the practice of multiple ability groupings continued discrimination.

TABLE 1 shows a comparison of the three populations in the five southwestern states (1950–60) with regard to the median school years completed. The "all-white" population (which includes the Spanish-speaking) had a higher median than the other groups; the Spanish-speaking had the lowest median except in Arizona and New Mexico in 1950, when the non-whites (in these cases predominantly Indian) had the lowest median. Note that in the ten-

TABLE 1

MEDIAN YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED FOR THREE POPULATIONS IN FIVE SOUTHWESTERN STATES, 1950 AND 1960*

STATE	SPANISH SURNAME		ALL WHITE		NON-WHITE	
	1950	1960	1950	1960	1950	1960
Arizona	6.1	7.0	10.6	11.7	5.5	7.0
California	7.6	8.6	11.8	12.1	8.9	10.5
Colorado	6.4	8.1	10.9	12.1	9.8	11.2
New Mexico	7.4	7.7	9.5	11.5	5.8	7.1
Texas	3.6	4.7	9.7	10.8	7.0	8.1

* The tables in this paper are adapted from Julian Samora, *The Spanish-Speaking People in the United States.* A Report to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. In Press.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE OF THREE POPULATIONS, 25 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER, WHO HAVE COMPLETED FOUR YEARS OF SCHOOL OR LESS, AND HIGH SCHOOL OR MORE, IN FIVE SOUTHWESTERN STATES, 1960*

STATE	SPANISH		ANGLO		NON-WHITE	
	Four Years or Less	High School or More	Four Years or Less	High School or More	Four Years or Less	High School or More
Arizona	35.1	14.6	22.5	45.0	37.5	15.7
California	24.0	24.4	3.6	54.8	12.0	39.8
Colorado	24.0	18.3	3.2	54.6	8.3	44.6
New Mexico	29.6	18.9	3.7	56.9	39.2	19.0
Texas	52.0	11.7	6.3	46.3	23.6	20.9

* These data are based on a 25-per cent sample by the Bureau of the Census.

year period the non-white population has had a slightly higher increase in all states. Note also that the non-whites in California, Colorado, and Texas (predominantly Negroes) show greater achievement than the Spanish-speaking.

Median school years completed is a crude statistic that does not discriminate very much. If we look at the data in another way, dramatic differences appear. Table 2 gives the percentages of the three populations that have completed four years of school or less, and high school or more, in the five states for 1960. Note the great differences between the Anglos and the other two populations. The Texas statistics are the most revealing.

Data on the metropolitan areas within these states, again show that the Spanish-speaking are concentrated in the lower educational category—"under four years"—a category described by some educators as "functionally illiterate." The metropolitan areas in Colorado and New Mexico have the lowest percentages (with the exception of San Francisco) of Spanish-speaking persons with less than four years of schooling. *Texas, in ten out of fifteen metropolitan areas, has Spanish populations with 40 or more per cent having less than four years of schooling;* eight out of ten metropolitan areas in California have 20 or more per cent in the same category.

Such low educational performance cannot be explained away by ascribing the low educational status of the Spanish-speaking to their Mexican origins. If a border city like San Diego has a functionally illiterate population of 20 per cent, why should Bakersfield, Stockton, and Fresno (farther north) have over 35 per cent of their Spanish populations in this category? Perhaps rurality is the explanation for such low educational status. But then the Spanish-speaking have been predominantly urban since 1950. Tucson (farther south) has 24 per cent, whereas Phoenix has 43 per cent in the same low educational category. In Texas, El Paso, a border city, shows 37 per cent functionally illiterate, whereas Laredo, another border city, shows 47 per cent; Lubbock, not a border city, shows 68 per cent in this category. Also, if El Paso's better showing is to be explained by the fact that the lower educational-status migrants from Mexico do not stop there, then how could Albuquerque (directly north and having a heavy concentration of Spanish) show only 19 per cent in the low-status category? It seems clear that Texas cities do less for the education of the Spanish generally as they move northward in the state—e.g., Corpus Christi (53 per cent), Austin (54 per cent—the state capital), Abilene (56 per cent), San Angelo (58 per cent). San Antonio has had a large Latin population for several decades; over four out of ten Latins

there have less than four years of schooling, whereas only 5 out of 100 Anglos are in the same category. San Antonio has done a remarkably better job for Negroes (15 per cent in the low category) than for the Spanish. Generally, in the southwest, non-whites show better educational achievement than the Spanish-speaking.

Two facets of the educational problem for this group are readily apparent: (1) the default of the school system, and therefore the community, in providing equality of opportunity in education for ethnic groupings; and (2) the lack of motivation for continuing education on the part of the Spanish-speaking.

School administrators and teachers have not faced up to the needs of the Spanish-speaking. It is easier and safer to prohibit the speaking of Spanish on the school ground and in the school (the need being to learn English) than to take the imaginative step of teaching both English and Spanish to both Anglos and Spanish-speaking students beginning in the elementary school. As a result, the "educated" Spanish-speaking person who has survived the school system is likely also to be one who has been stripped of his native language, or at best speaks and writes it imperfectly. To the enlightened, this situation is such a waste of human resources; to others, including some school teachers, the burden of proof is on the shoulders of the minority: "If you want to be American, speak American."

How many teachers of American history in the southwest begin with the Pilgrim Fathers rather than developing the cultural and historical heritage of the area, leading to the Pilgrim Fathers? The basic question is this: Is there anything about the Spanish-speaking in the southwest that is important and desirable and that could be used by the school system to bring recognition and higher status to members of that group in the eyes of their peers and the community? The answer, of course, is yes. Do school systems take advantage of these cultural-historical experiences and contributions? Aside from a few instances, the answer, unfortunately, is no.

In brief, the available literature and other sources suggest that such factors as inferior facilities and teachers, inadequate counseling, lack of encouragement from the staff, and differing curriculums have resulted in inferior education for this population, or, in many instances, a very low educational achievement.

Most observers, professional and nonprofessional, hold that the Spanish-speaking lack sufficient motivation to stay in school. The most important contributing factors are: their cultural background including their value orientations, lack of supportive behavior from

family and peer groups, lack of understanding of the role that the school can play in economic and social mobility, and the more commonplace stereotypical reasons: they are lazy and shiftless; they don't care to get ahead; and they lack ability. Some cases can be pointed out to support the above contentions.

If the great majority of the Spanish-speaking enroll their youngsters in the elementary schools, if most of these children continue through the eighth grade, and then if the tremendous dropouts occur at the end of junior high school or the beginning of senior high school —is the genesis for this lack of motivation within the group or outside the group? The writer believes that this lack of motivation originates in the school and community where the child, in the process of gaining an education, internalizes attitudes of inferiority, futility, and frustration. If he looks about him and wonders about his occupational, educational, and status opportunities; about the section of town and the house in which he lives; about his role models; about his socioeconomic status and the opportunities open to him—he is likely not to be inspired to great effort. If, too, neither his family, peer groups, school, nor community come forth with continuing encouragement and support, dropping out of school and getting a job is probably the best answer to his situation.

If there is much motivation in the early elementary grades (as suggested by high enrollments), what happens to it in the eighth, ninth, and tenth grades? This question requires research rather than assertions and opinions.

Foundations and other groups interested in advancing the educational level of this population have made inroads into the problem of education by providing scholarships and fellowships at the university undergraduate and graduate levels. Many foundations actively seek applicants and are perplexed by the small number available. They fail to realize, however, that the *greatest* need at the moment is not at the university level, but rather at the junior– and senior–high school levels and the freshman college level.

Many a student would complete high school if he could afford the books. Many a student could go to college on a scholarship if he could afford clothes and room and board. In other words, this immediate problem is not to be solved by competitive scholarships, as useful as they are. What is needed is a more basic approach which should include the elimination of the various barriers and inequalities that contribute so heavily to the early dropout of these students.